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SPECIFICATION

TITLE OF INVENTION

Method and device for introducing state changes into athletic activities.

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

Not Applicable.

STATEMENT REGARDING FEDERALLY SPONSORED RESEARCH OR  
DEVELOPMENT

Not Applicable.

REFERENCE TO SEQUENCE LISTING , A TABLE, OR A COMPUTER PROGRAM  
LISTING COMPACT DISK APPENDIX

Not Applicable.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION.

Most athletic activities require the participants to respond rapidly to changes in their environment. For instance, they must constantly reevaluate their course of action depending upon their own velocity and position and that of a ball, opposing players, and teammates. However in training, and especially in solo training, the environment tends to be largely static. In the game known as soccer in the U.S.A, and football elsewhere, a common training drill consists of a player dribbling a ball around a series of cones or other similar markers. Such variation as exists consists of predetermined decisions such

1 as to alternate between passing on the left on one cone and on the right on the next.

2 Effectively such training exists within an invariant environmental state.

3       The disadvantage of such a drill is that it does not train athletes to constantly  
4 observe, analyze, and react, as they must in a real game. The present invention allows  
5 the introduction of transitions between multiple environmental states, such transitions  
6 being either strictly periodic or randomly varying in frequency, enabling in training  
7 situations a better simulation of the timing and thought processes of the game in question.  
8 The invention also allows new types of games to be created and played which incorporate  
9 the varying states expressed by the device into the play of the game. The invention  
10 accomplishes these goals by maintaining a time varying internal state which is transmitted  
11 to athletes, typically via a visual method such as colored lights, so that the athletes may  
12 interpret these signals as a change in the training or game environment. In the soccer  
13 training drill the invention would replace the traditional practice cone and would indicate  
14 to the player the manner in which the ball should be passed around the obstacle.

15       The intentional introduction of transitions between multiple contest states is  
16 common in arcade and video games and other electronic entertainment but there is little  
17 precedent for this in athletics. The only common examples occur at or before the actual  
18 contest: the opening toss of a coin before a game or the drop of the flag in an automobile  
19 race. In music the periodic signal from a metronome is often used and there may be  
20 instances where the signal from such a metronome has been used to aid athletes  
21 synchronize their movements to music. That differs from the utility of the present

1 invention, which is not synchronization, but the presentation of varying training or game  
2 states to the athlete.

3 The following U.S. patents disclose concepts that bear some relation to the present  
4 invention. However, none of the cited prior art discloses an invention having the  
5 versatility or utility of the present invention.

6 Stuler U.S. Pat. No. 3,629,600 discloses a battery powered traffic light controller.  
7 This and other traffic controllers differ markedly from the device of the current patent  
8 application. Such controllers transition between their 3 states (green,yellow,red) in a  
9 single fixed order. Additionally, these transitions are either triggered by external sensors  
10 or occur at fixed time intervals. The present invention does not use external sensors to  
11 trigger state transitions. Instead, a large repertoire of randomly varying state transitions  
12 useful in athletic training are provided. The traffic controllers would be predictable and  
13 useless for injecting variation into athletic training. Conversely, the device of the present  
14 patent, when configured appropriately for athletic training, would lead to havoc if utilized  
15 as a traffic controller.

16 Ramsey U.S. Pat. No. 5,325,340 discloses an athletic training device which is  
17 utilized for pacing. Its function is the antithesis of that of the device of the present patent  
18 application. The pacing device produces a certainty. It tells the athlete exactly where to  
19 be at a given time and even goes so far as to provide a correction signal when the athlete  
20 is too far ahead or behind. The present device produces an uncertainty. Its purpose is to  
21 present a signal which is variable and unpredictable. Moreover, the feedback circuit of

1 Ramsey's device requires a measurement of the athlete's position. No such measurement  
2 is required or supported by the present invention.

3 Karrenberg U.S. Pat. No. 4,949,320 and Heywood et al. U.S. Pat No. 3,789,402  
4 disclose athletic interval training devices. These devices indicate to the athlete a period  
5 for each of several athletic activities, typically a repeating run/walk/rest cycle. These  
6 devices are essentially modified clocks, they provide the athlete with a fixed and utterly  
7 predictable series of changes in the athletic environment. The present device produces an  
8 uncertainty – the athlete cannot predict, except statistically, what the environmental state  
9 signaled by the device will be at some future time. Both the cited devices and the present  
10 device allow the athlete to set the mean time in each state. However, the present device  
11 will only asymptotically approach that mean time over a long period and will have a large  
12 variance in the duration of each state. Conversely, the cited devices will have no variance  
13 (within the accuracy of the implementation) in the duration of each state. This is  
14 consistent with the intended uses. The cited devices are long term pacing devices,  
15 indicating to the athlete a particular exertion level to maintain for several minutes. The  
16 present device instead attempts to mimic the unpredictable and often rapid changes that  
17 occur in athletic events.

18 Miley U.S. Pat. No. 5,921,890 discloses yet another athletic pacing device, this  
19 one being optimized for use in swimming. As is true for the pacing devices disclosed  
20 above, it is designed to produce a certainty, in this case it emits a periodic signal to which  
21 the athlete attempts to synchronize swimming strokes. The utility of the present device is

1 quite different, it is intended to signal unpredictable changes in the athletic environment.  
2 The sorts of unpredictable state changes provided by the present device are not  
3 appropriate for this type of pacing training. The present device would be better employed  
4 aquatically in the training of water polo players, who could be signaled to swim in various  
5 directions, for various periods of time, in an unpredictable manner.

6 Goldfarb et al. U.S. Pat. No. 3,933,354 discloses a martial arts amusement device  
7 in which a light at one of ten positions on a picture of a combatant is lit. When a player  
8 strikes that position the light turns off, the player's score is incremented, and the game  
9 lights another region on the simulated combatant. The lights are selected from a pattern  
10 sufficiently complex to appear in random order to the player. This is a one or two player  
11 game. This invention is primarily a game rather than a serious athletic training device  
12 and it is described in very narrow terms without any general application to other types of  
13 athletic training or contests. This invention requires constant input from the player - the  
14 game will lock in any device state where a lamp is lit unless the player strikes the lit part  
15 of the display to allow it to transition to the next state. The designers recognized that a  
16 detector failure would render the game inoperable and provided a failsafe mechanism to  
17 transition should that occur - but such a transition is not a normal operating mode of the  
18 invention. In comparison, the invention of the present patent application, as it might be  
19 implemented for martial arts practice, would have lit one or more lamps for short periods  
20 of varying duration during which a lit lamp would have been a target for the athlete. The  
21 device would then have transitioned to another device state whether or not the athlete

1 succeeded in striking the target(s). An alternative embodiment, which could be used  
2 with existing training dummies, would dispense with the lamps entirely and instead  
3 announce the targets through a speaker.

4 Elstein et al. U.S. Pat. No. 4,702,475 disclose a sports technique and reaction  
5 training system in which a particular movement pattern is to be executed by the  
6 participant in a given amount of time in response to a start signal that determines which  
7 of several such patterns is to be executed. This invention requires that the participant  
8 return to a base position to trigger another training cycle - so that the time required to  
9 complete the movement pattern may be measured. Moreover, the purpose of the  
10 invention is to train the participant to carry out a choreographed set of motions in  
11 minimal time. The present invention is very different. Some of the differences are: the  
12 position of the athlete with respect to the device is not fixed (there are no intrinsic start  
13 and stop positions); the device runs independently of the athlete's actions (other than  
14 setting it and turning it on, the athlete would not normally affect the state of the device);  
15 more than one device could be simultaneously employed in training or during a game by  
16 an athlete or athletes; and the utility of the invention is to provide state transitions in  
17 training to better simulate actual play, or in play, to provide more variety to the game, but  
18 not to improve the performance of a predetermined choreographed set of motions.

19 Other instances of the class of athletic measurement devices examined in detail in  
20 the preceding paragraph are disclosed in Alston et al. 4,502,489, Mackovjak U.S. Pat. No.  
21 5,897,457, Guillen U.S. Pat. N. 6,066,105, and Feiner et al. U.S. Pat. No. 6,278,378 B1.

1 These devices all differ from the present invention in requiring two trigger events: one to  
2 initiate a measurement and a second one to indicate its termination. The devices then  
3 report the performance in some manner. The present invention utilizes no triggers, does  
4 not measure performance in any way, and is used in an altogether different manner than  
5 any of these devices.

6 Eger U.S. Pat. No. 5,812,239 discloses a visual training device comprising a  
7 plurality of LEDs under microprocessor control arranged around a central hole that in  
8 some embodiments holds additional optics. The user looks through the hole and focuses  
9 at infinity while simultaneously viewing the LEDs in the peripheral vision as they are lit.  
10 To do so the user's eyes must necessarily be centered on the hole and offset back from the  
11 device at such a distance that the LEDs will appear in the correct visual region.  
12 Effectively this fixes the location of the user's head with respect to the device. This may  
13 be an exemplary device for training the eyes of athletes. However, a person standing in a  
14 fixed position and rolling her eyes is not engaged in an athletic endeavor, even if such  
15 training is of some utility later when she does participate in an athletic activity. These  
16 embodiments neither elicit nor allow significant bodily motion and consequently have no  
17 utility in athletic training. That this is an eye training device, rather than an athletic  
18 training device, is further emphasized by those implementations employing colored filters  
19 specifically to exercise different sets of retinal cells, which have different chromatic  
20 sensitivities.

1 Eger also discloses more active embodiments that are designed to measure  
2 reaction time and accuracy in response to the visual stimulus. As such, these have  
3 triggers and other features as described above for other similar measurement devices, and  
4 so differ in fundamental ways from the present invention.

5 Eger does not disclose in any embodiment or method the concept of changing the  
6 state of the athletic environment. Reactions, if any, are always targeted back to the device  
7 itself, and specifically to the signaling lamp, such action serving to confirm that the  
8 light's stimulus was perceived, and in some cases to measure the speed and accuracy of  
9 that response. This differs fundamentally from the present device which informs the  
10 athlete of a change in the training or game environment with the athlete's subsequent  
11 response being in that context, and being generally external to, and unrelated to, the  
12 presence of the device itself. For instance, in a baseball pitching exercise the present  
13 device might be located between the pitcher's mound and home plate and would indicate  
14 that the ball should be thrown to a particular base or to home plate, all of which are  
15 traditional targets in this athletic context. However, the present device would not itself  
16 become the target of the directed action. Similarly, replacing an inert cone with a cone  
17 shaped embodiment of the present device in a soccer dribbling drill would add variation  
18 to an otherwise static practice but it would not change the nature of the cone in that drill  
19 by converting it into a target.



1 BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

2 This device is to be employed in the training of athletes and the playing of athletic  
3 games. During these activities athletes observe and respond to signals that vary with time  
4 and are generated and displayed by the device. In this manner the device adds a new  
5 element to athletic training and enables new types of sports to be played.

6 SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

7 The present device provides for one or more logical states to be continuously  
8 varied, either periodically or randomly, and for this state information to be transmitted to  
9 one or more athletes for the purpose of varying the training or game environment. The  
10 athlete would perceive this information either visually or aurally as appropriate for each  
11 sport. For a specific example consider again the soccer drill described above. This  
12 device would either adorn or replace the typical cone marker and would maintain via  
13 electronic means two binary variables which would transition On and Off in a periodic or  
14 random pattern. This information would be conveyed to the athlete visually - for  
15 instance, by providing two rings of light around the cone, one blue, one red, which are lit  
16 according to the value of the matching state variable. Together these two variables would  
17 encode four device states with the local (to this cone) meanings "Pass on Left", "Pass on  
18 Right", "Pass on Left or Right", and "Do not Pass". The time fraction the device spends  
19 in each state would be adjustable, as would be the mean frequency of the transitions  
20 between these device states and the minimum hold time spent in each device state before  
21 a transition would be permitted. An athlete approaching the cone would observe the state

1 of the device and respond as appropriate. Even this simple four state training device  
2 could easily be employed in numerous other drills in this and other sports. For instance,  
3 the same four state device placed at the top of the basketball key could indicate "left side  
4 layup", "right side layup", "shoot from the top of the key", or "shoot immediately." In  
5 baseball it might tell a pitcher to throw a curve, slider, fastball, or to throw out the runner  
6 at first base. The invention may also be used to globally alter the rules of the athletic  
7 contest or practice. Examples: "when the red light is lit players may not shoot on goal" or  
8 "player number 5 may shoot".

#### 9 BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

10 The manifestation of the present invention will necessarily vary depending upon  
11 the particular sport. This is particularly true when considering aquatic versus terrestrial  
12 playing environments. To illustrate this invention a preferred embodiment is presented  
13 for use in the context of a terrestrial game like soccer.

14 Figure 1 Side view of the exterior of the preferred embodiment.

15 Figure 2 Block diagram of the mechanism of the preferred embodiment.

#### 16 Reference Numerals Used in the Drawings:

- 17 10. Ring of Red Light Emitting Diodes
- 18 20. Ring of Blue Light Emitting Diodes
- 19 30. Plastic Cone
- 20 40. Removable Battery
- 21 50. Electronic Controller

- 1 60. Power Switch
- 2 70. Frequency Dial
- 3 80. Hold Time Dial
- 4 90. DIP Switch DP1
- 5 100. DIP Switch DP2

6 DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS.

7 Figure 1 is a drawing of the exterior of the preferred embodiment of the invention.  
8 There are two rings of colored light emitting diodes (LED's) on the device, a red one  
9 located near the cone's tip **10** and a blue one **20** located near the middle of the cone. The  
10 remainder of the exterior of the device is composed of a strong and durable plastic case  
11 **30** in a contrasting color such as yellow or light orange.

12 Figure 2 shows a block diagram of the mechanism. A removable battery **40**  
13 provides power. It is connected to a small electronic controller **50**. This is a typical  
14 embedded microprocessor based controller that reads its program from internal read only  
15 memory. When power is applied via an ON/OFF switch **60**, and at one second intervals  
16 thereafter, the controller reads the desired device settings from two dials **70, 80**, and from  
17 a pair of 8 position DIP switches DP1, DP2 **90, 100**, and uses its internal program and this  
18 setting information to drive the red **10** and blue **20** sets of display LEDs. The Frequency  
19 Dial **70** controls the mean frequency at which the device may change state, which can be  
20 varied between 600 transitions per minute and 0.1 transitions per minute. The Hold  
21 Time Dial **80** sets the minimum hold time a device state must be maintained before a

1 state transition is allowed and is variable between 200 milliseconds and 5 minutes. The  
2 switches on DP1 **90** and DP2 **100** control the device in the following manner:  
3 DP1,0 determines if the transitions are periodic (fixed rate) or randomly varying around a  
4 mean frequency.  
5 DP1,1 determines the device state order as sequential {0,1,2,3,0...} or random.  
6 DP1,2-4 determine the occupancy for device state 0  
7 DP1,5-7 determine the occupancy for device state 1  
8 DP2,0-1 unused  
9 DP2,2-4 determine the occupancy for device state 2  
10 DP2,5-7 determine the occupancy for device state 3  
11 The occupancy values set on DP1 **90** and DP2 **100** are integers in the range 0  
12 through 7. The total occupancy for the system is the sum of the four device state  
13 occupancies. For instance, if these values were 0,5,3,2 (for states 0 through 3,  
14 respectively) the device would never enter state 0, would spend 50% of its time in state 1,  
15 30% in state 2, and 20% in state 3. To vary only between states 1 and 2, and spend equal  
16 time (on average) in each the setting would be 0,N,N,0 where N is between 1 and 7.  
17 When used in the soccer dribbling drill application a typical setting might be: random  
18 transitions with a mean frequency of 15 transitions per minute, a minimum hold time of  
19 .5 seconds, random transition order, and occupancies set to 2,7,7,2. It is assumed that  
20 situations will arise where the invention will also be used as a static marker in fixed state.  
21 To lock the device into state 2 the occupancy values would be set at 0,0,7,0.

1 Table 1 shows the states of the signal lights and their interpretation by the athlete.  
2 The first column indicates the state of the red LEDs, the second column the state of the  
3 blue LEDs, the third column the device state, and the fourth column indicates the  
4 interpretation of the device state to be made by the athlete within the context of a soccer  
5 dribbling drill.

6 TABLE 1

Red Lights	Blue Lights	Device State	Meaning to player
off	off	0	Do not pass
on	off	1	Pass on right side
off	on	2	Pass on left side
on	on	3	Pass on either side

7  
8 One example of the invention has been described here in detail to comply with the  
9 Patent Statutes and to prove that this device could be constructed by one skilled in the  
10 arts. It is emphasized that numerous other implementations of the invention are possible,  
11 none of which depart from the scope of the invention itself. These include, but are not  
12 limited to: utilizing similar or different implementation technologies; utilizing similar or  
13 different implementation details, especially presentation of the state to the athlete via  
14 alternative means such as symbolic or alphanumeric displays, or synthesized sounds or  
15 speech; customizing for one or more different sports; utilizing more or fewer device  
16 states; utilizing physically larger or smaller devices; utilizing multiple independent  
17 devices simultaneously on the athletic field; utilizing devices which are carried by the  
18 athletes or attached to athletic equipment; utilizing remote control of multiple devices

1 which all display the same state; utilizing remote control of multiple devices which  
2 display different states; utilizing multiple remote devices which are activated sequentially  
3 in a predefined or randomly selected in order to simulate, for instance, the motions of  
4 another player; and providing in addition to the display of device state information the  
5 selective or broadcast relaying of communications from coaches, referees, or other  
6 players.

7

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1 CLAIMS

- 2 2. A device for introducing state changes in athletic activities which comprises:
- 3 ~~a time varying device state; said state being comprised of~~ at least one binary variable,
- 4 said variable(s) encoding the device states;
- 5 a time varying value, the current device state, encoded by the binary variable(s);
- 6 a display; said display presenting the current device state in a form that the athlete
- 7 may interpret as a change in the athletic environment;
- 8 a means for setting the device; said means determining the timing and order in which
- 9 the device transitions between device states, and the average time spent in each
- 10 device state;
- 11 a controller; said controller reading the device settings, ~~maintaining the device~~
- 12 ~~state~~ transitioning between device states in accordance with those settings, and
- 13 communicating the ~~resulting time varying~~ current device state to the display;
- 14 an interruptible power source;
- 15 a durable case; said durable case being appropriate for an athletic activity.
- 16 3. A device according to claim 2, wherein the controller utilizes a microprocessor.
- 17 4. A device according to claim 2, wherein the display comprises sets of differently
- 18 colored LEDs.
- 19 11. A method for the training of athletes and the playing of athletic games comprising the
- 20 steps of:

- 1 (a) setting the ~~manner in which~~ mean frequency of transitions between device states,  
2 the minimum hold time and the average time spent in each device state, and the  
3 order of the device state is to be varied in time; transitions;
- 4 (b) the device varying its current device state in accordance with those settings;
- 5 (c) the device displaying ~~said~~ its current device state to the athletes in a form  
6 interpretable by them as a change of the environmental state within the context  
7 ~~of the current athletic activity;~~
- 8 ~~(d) the athletes reacting to the provided environmental state information as~~  
9 ~~appropriate for~~ the current athletic activity.
- 10 22. A device according to claim 2, wherein a dial controls the mean frequency of  
11 transitions between device states.
- 12 23. A device according to claim 2, wherein a dial sets the minimum hold time spent in  
13 each device state before a transition is permitted.
- 14 24. A device according to claim 2, wherein a switch sets the ~~device state order to be~~ order  
15 of transitions between device states as sequential or random.
- 16 25. A device according to claim 2, wherein ~~the~~ an occupancy value is set for each device  
17 state, said occupancy values ~~determined~~ determining the average time spent in each  
18 device state.
- 19 26. A device according to claim 2, wherein the interruptible power source is a removable  
20 battery.
- 21 27. A device according to claim 2, wherein a switch may interrupt the power.



- 1    **28.** A device according to claim 2, wherein ~~each set~~the display comprises sets of LEDs ~~is~~  
2        arranged in ~~a ring~~ings around a conical case.
- 3    **29.** A device according to claim 2, wherein ~~each set of LEDs has a different color~~the  
4        display comprises sets of differently colored LEDs arranged with each set in a colored  
5        ring around a conical case.
- 6    **30.** A method according to claim 11, wherein the order of the device state transitions is  
7        random and the timing of the device state transitions is random.
- 8    **31.** A method according to claim 11, wherein the order of the device state transitions is  
9        sequential and the timing of the device state transitions is random.
- 10   **32.** A method according to claim 11, wherein the order of the device state transitions is  
11       random and the timing of the device state transitions is periodic.
- 12   **33.** A method according to claim 11, wherein the order of the device state transitions is  
13       sequential and the timing of the device state transitions is periodic.
- 14   **34.** A method according to claim 11, wherein the athletic activity is a soccer dribbling  
15       ~~drill and the four states of the device~~drill, the device utilizes four device states, and  
16       these device states correspond to the environmental states: “do not pass”, “pass on  
17       the right”, “pass on the left”, and “pass on either side”.
- 18   **35.** A method according to claim 11, wherein the athletic activity is a basketball ~~drill and~~  
19       ~~the four states of the device~~drill, the device utilizes four device states, and these  
20       device states correspond to the environmental states: “left side layup”, “right side  
21       layup”, “shoot from the top of the key”, and “shoot immediately”.

Appl. No. : 10/025,310 Marked up Amended Specification  
Amdt. dated Aug 28, 2004  
Reply to the Office Action of Jun 15, 2004

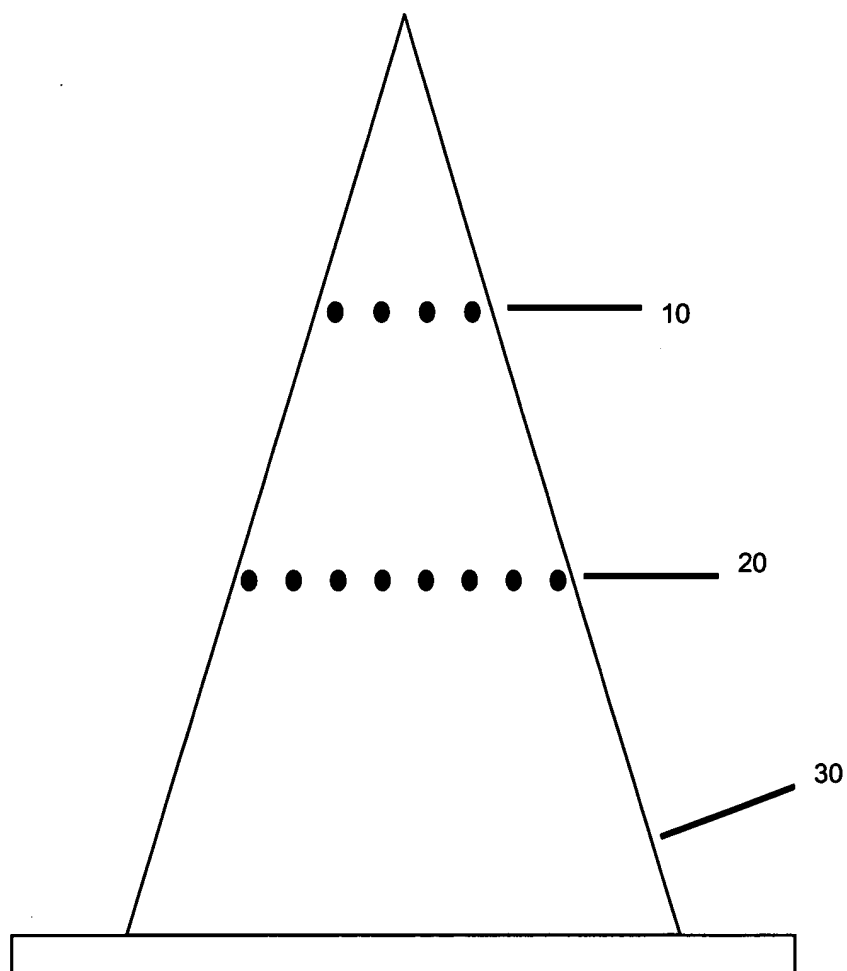
- 1 36. A method according to claim 11, wherein the athletic activity is a baseball pitching  
2 ~~drill and the four states of the device~~drill, the device utilizes four device states, and  
3 these device states correspond to the environmental states: “throw a curve”, “throw a  
4 slider”, “throw a fastball”, “throw out the runner at first base”.

1 ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

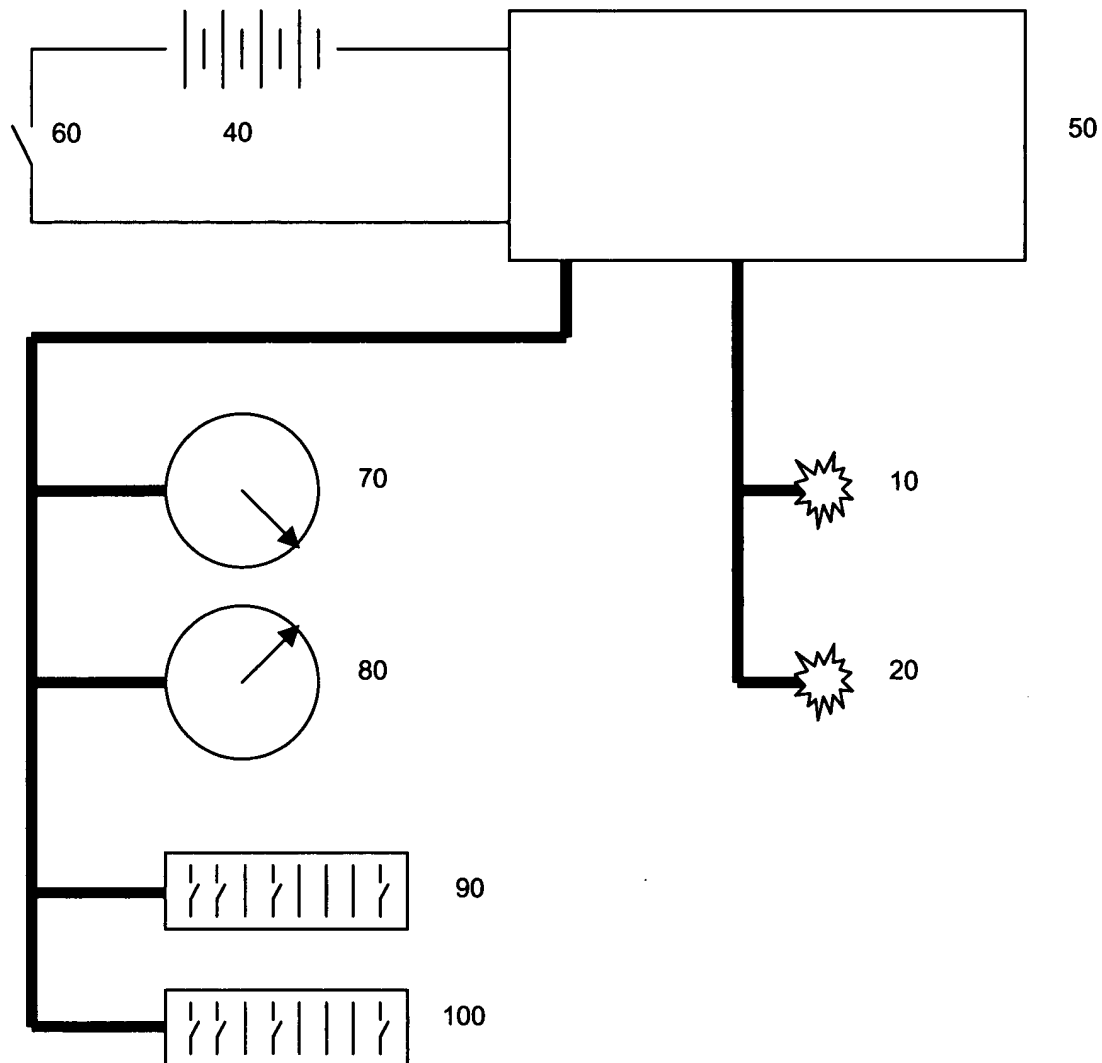
2 A device is described for introducing variation in athletic training and competitive  
3 events. This device maintains an internal state that occupies one of several allowed  
4 values. Depending upon the selected configuration, the device changes internal state at  
5 regular or irregular intervals, progresses through its allowed values sequentially or in  
6 random order, and spends a different designated fraction of time in each state. This  
7 variable and typically unpredictable state is presented to the field of play where one or  
8 more athletes receive the information and react to it as a change in their athletic training  
9 or game environment.

1 FIGURE 1. The exterior of the invention – side view

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1 FIGURE 2. Block diagram of the mechanism  
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Appl. No. : 10/025,310 Patent Documents cited  
Amdt. dated Aug 28, 2004  
Reply to the Office Action of Jun 15, 2004

U.S. PATENT DOCUMENTS CITED in the REVISED APPLICATION:

U.S. Patent No. 3,629,600: EMERGENCY TRAFFIC LIGHT CONTROLLER

U.S. Patent No. 3,789,402: ELECTRONIC SIGNAL DEVICE AND METHOD

U.S. Patent No. 3,933,354: REFLEX TESTING AMUSEMENT DEVICE

U.S. Patent No. 4,502,489: APPARATUS FOR MEASURING AUDITORY  
REACTION TIME.

U.S. Patent No. 4,702,475: SPORTS TECHNIQUE AND REACTION TRAINING  
SYSTEM

U.S. Patent No. 4,949,320: ACOUSTIC SIGNAL APPARATUS.

U.S. Patent No. 5,325,340: PACING DEVICE

U.S. Patent No. 5,812,239: METHOD AND ARRANGEMENT FOR THE  
ENHANCEMENT OF VISION AND/OR HAND-EYE COORDINATION

U.S. Patent No. 5,897,457: ATHLETIC PERFORMANCE MONITORING SYSTEM.

U.S. Patent No. 5,921,890: PROGRAMMABLE AUDIBLE PACING DEVICE.

U.S. Patent No. 6,066,105: REFLEX TESTER AND METHOD FOR MEASUREMENT

U.S. Patent No. 6,278,378 B1: PERFORMANCE AND ENTERTAINMENT DEVICE  
AND METHOD OF USING THE SAME